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ABSTRACT

Fourteen young men and women, who as teenagers had run away from home, were subjects of an intensive clinical case study which was a followup of a larger-scale survey of runaways conducted in the early 1960s. A major purpose of the research was to determine how the former runaways had fared as adults and whether or not their early behavior had foreshadowed later adjustment problems. Intrafamily comparisons between the runaways and a sibling were also made. Two factors seen to be most prominently associated with differential long-term outcomes--whether or not the youthful act was a repeated or an isolated occurrence, and the individual's social class. In general, repeaters most nearly fit a model of running away as a sociopathic act, indicative of severe disorders. A single act of running away was associated with little long-term disability. Siblings of runaways, with one exception, had made successful adjustments to adult life. Discussion centers on the prognostic value of repeated running away for the prediction of psychosocial disability, the contribution of individual psychology to the outcomes observed, and on the finding that premature separation from adult authority may lead to a prolonged and ambivalent dependence on it. (Author)

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RUNAWAY CHILDREN TWELVE YEARS LATER:

A FOLLOW-UP

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"I was so busy establishing my
independence that I never made it."

A Runaway
12 Years Later

INTRODUCTION

Children who run away from home have received a great deal of research attention in recent years, but remarkably little has been learned about the long-term outcomes of runaways. This is unfortunate, because it is difficult to devise intelligent and effective interventions and public policies regarding child runaways without knowing something about the kinds of adult adjustments they are likely to make. Only two follow-up studies of runaways were found in the literature. The most recent, by Howell, Emmons, and Franks (1973), explored the life adjustment of 41 middle-class runaways who had been clients of Project Place (a multi-service agency in Boston) during 1970. Although their findings showed that the majority of the youth described themselves as being more satisfied with their lives than they were before they ran away, it was not always clear in what ways the life situations of the youth were felt to have improved.

The other follow-up study was reported by Robbins (1958) and Robbins and O'Neill (1959). This 30-year follow-up of children seen in a child guidance clinic between 1924 and 1929 revealed that runaways had higher rates of mental illness, more frequent arrests, incarcerations, divorces, and diagnoses of sociopathic personality than controls (former patients who were not runaways). The relevance of these research findings to the problems of contemporary runaways is uncertain since they were obtained from a different generation (mid-1920s) of runaways. The relevance for non-clinical populations is also uncertain.

The purpose of the present study is to provide a longitudinal perspective on the runaway phenomena and to better understand subsequent life

adjustment among a non-institutional, non-clinical population of runaway youth. It was designed as a follow-up pilot effort of an earlier investigation of suburban children who ran away from home in the mid-1960s (Shellow, Schamp, Liebow, and Unger, 1967).

METHOD

The Original Study

In 1963-64, the Mental Health Study Center, National Institute of Mental Health initiated a study of runaway youth in Prince George's County, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. The sample consisted of all youth ages 10 to 17, who were reported missing to the County Police. During a one-year period some 731 youth had been reported as missing. Of these, 631 were classified as "runaways" according to the following definition: "The runaway is a child who leaves home voluntarily with the knowledge that he will be missed." The data base for the original study included two types of interview data. One set came from intensive interviews with parents immediately after they had filed Missing Persons Reports. These interviews focused on the events surrounding the child's absence from home, household composition, family history and the child's school experience, interpersonal relationships and emotional problems.

A second set of interview data came from taped intensive interviews with the runaways of about two hours each. These interviews focused on their perspectives of themselves, their families and peers, their schooling, and their plans for and images of the future. Ninety-six intensive interviews were completed.[1]

This study identified two separate groups of children within the runaway population: One-time runaways, by far the majority, and repeaters (those who ran away two or more times). A major conclusion of the original study was that, for the one-time runaway, the runaway act appeared to be a "plain

forthright expression of dissatisfaction at home or in school," with few signs of unusual distress in their family or peer relationships, in school, or in other fundamental aspects of their lives. However, for the repeater, running away appeared to be associated with serious personal and/or family disturbances, difficulty in school, and frequent involvement with law enforcement agencies.

The Follow-Up Study

This report is a follow-up pilot study of the original sample some 12 years later. Since a major goal was to determine whether a full-scale follow-up of the 631 former runaways was feasible, we made two decisions: (1) to limit this pilot effort to those former runaways and their families who remained in the original study area and were available for face-to-face interviews; (2) to focus primarily on the 96 children who were interviewed in depth in the original study. Twenty such persons of the original 96 were located by means of standard location procedures including phone directories, registered mail, addresses from 12 years ago, and contacts with relatives and former neighbors.[2]

Because the study design calls for interviews with siblings and parents, as well as with the former runaway, we required the consent of at least three members of each family. Fifteen of the 20 located runaways and their families agreed to participate. One "only child" was dropped, leaving a "sample" of 14 runaways and their families.

Siblings were included in the study both as sources of data on the runaways themselves and as a non-runaway comparison group. Siblings were especially well suited to this latter function since, having shared the same household of origin as the runaways, their childhood experiences are identical with those of the runaways with respect to family size, family and household structure, social class, and, to a lesser extent, family dynamics. Where two

or more siblings were present, the sibling of the same sex and/or closest in age was selected. In addition to the former runaways and their siblings, at least one parent or parent surrogate in each family was interviewed. A total of 44 intensive interviews were conducted, including at least three in each family.

The runaways themselves consisted of 14 individuals: 11 men (ten white, one black), and three women. Six came from middle-class backgrounds, with fathers who had white-collar jobs: a business executive, two federal government officials, a journalist, a school principal, and a Naval officer. The others came from working-class families; the fathers' occupations included a printer, a truckdriver, a welder, a maintenance man, a mechanic with the gas company and another with the electric company, a foreman, and a munitions worker. Seven had run away more than once; seven were one-time runaways.

Data were collected through the use of interviews conducted in face-to-face fashion using a semi-structured interview schedule.[3] Questions covered a range of areas about social development and personal adjustment, focusing on the 12 years between 1963-4 and the time of the follow-up interview (1975-6). Questions from the original 1963-4 interviews were also included, permitting a number of comparisons between circumstances then and now. Each interview lasted from two to four hours and, with few exceptions, was conducted in the home of the interviewee with no one else present. All of the interviews were conducted by the same interviewer (Lucy Olson) and all were tape-recorded and transcribed. Whenever possible and appropriate, the school and police records, and parent and runaway interviews developed in the original study, were used as a check against the present material. Apart from the question of feasibility,

the present pilot study focused on the following questions: How do runaway children adapt to later events and circumstances? Are the experiences and difficulties they face peculiar to them, or are they shared with their non-runaway siblings? How do repeaters and non-repeaters compare? What and how much difference does social class make in the long-term outcomes of these children?

FINDINGS

The major objective of this study was to assess the level and patterns of social functioning of runaway youth 12 years after running away. The focus of this paper is on school, work, family relationships, and contacts with community agencies.

School

For most people, graduation from high school and entry into the work force are pivotal events, each anchoring the individual in the community and sharpening his definition of himself and his role--actual or anticipated--in society. For the runaways, school clearly failed to have its desired or anticipated effects. Table 1 summarizes and compares some of the findings on the school careers of the runaways and their non-runaway siblings. Eight of the 14 runaways dropped out of high school before graduating; only six completed high school, and this only with considerable difficulty. None went beyond high school. These abbreviated school careers contrast sharply with those of the runaway siblings who, with one exception, all received their diplomas around the expected age of 18. Six went on to college, all six graduated, and two continued into professional and graduate schools.

Trouble with school manifested itself not only in the runaways' premature departure from it, but also in the serious academic problems they encountered there. None did well academically; eight (57%) experienced

serious academic problems (i.e., repeated failure, retentions, and so on), and several were "over-age-in-grade" throughout most of their high school years. If they graduated, they did so well behind their peers. In contrast, only one of the siblings had comparable academic problems. Six were outstanding students throughout both their high school and college years.

School problems of the runaways also included behavior problems. Runaways repeatedly disrupted classes, had regular confrontations with school authorities, and were often suspended or expelled. Seventy-one percent of the runaways as against 7% of the siblings were reported to have had serious behavior problems at school.

More difficult to summarize in objective terms is the sense of boredom, frustration, alienation and defeat felt by most runaways at school who generally took little interest in their studies or in the cultural and recreational programs offered. Typically, they saw their teachers and classrooms as hostile and restrictive, and frequently sought to avoid them. Chronic truancy, then, can perhaps best be seen as a proxy measure of boredom, frustration and defeat. The data also suggests that the runaways' school problems were not distinctive and unrelated events, but were rather pieces of a broader picture of the runaways' overall failure to be integrated into the activities and structure of the school system.

Interviews with the siblings, in contrast, show them to be more conforming and more accepting of the system. They tended to see school in terms of the opportunities it offered for advancement and for enrichment of their lives. Unlike the chronically truant runaways, their attendance was consistent, and they took their school work seriously.

Repeaters and Non-Repeaters

In each of the areas covered by Table 1, the performances of the runaway repeaters and non-repeaters are markedly different. The repeaters--all of

whom, with one exception, dropped out of high school-- account for most of the differences between runaways and non-runaways in terms of length of schooling, seriousness of academic problems and behavioral problems. All of the repeaters had chronic social or behavioral problems at school and had, by far, the poorest attendance records. Some spent their time in parking lots or nearby woods smoking pot or "just fooling around, not doing much of anything." When they did appear in school, they were likely to be either disruptive or passive and withdrawn: "I sat there like a ghost," said one, "It was as though I didn't exist." Some simply vanished. Others went unnoticed or were ignored

Social Class

While all of the runaways had school problems, the kinds of problems they had, and the way they experienced them, seemed to be importantly shaped by social class differences. Middle-class runaways were expected not merely to finish high school but to attend college (and even graduate school in some cases). Only three of these young people finished high school. None went on to college. In an important sense, the middle-class children "forfeited" more education by this early curtailment of school than their working-class counterparts. Thus, a comparison of working-class and middle-class sibling pairs shows much greater differences in length of schooling for middle class than working class youth. Among the middle-class young people, differences between runaways and their siblings in years of schooling ranged from 3.5 to 9 years; for the working-class young people the range was smaller, 1 to 3 years.

Reactions to school experiences also seemed related to differences in social class. The working-class runaways tended to cause more disruption in the classroom, get into more fights, and to have less respect for school authorities than their middle-class counterparts. As one working-class young man boasted, "When the teacher hassled me...I'd tell her to go to hell." Another spelled out his technique for disrupting class: "We had this real ole

teacher, she'd be standin' in the middle of the room givin' a lecture, and I'd get up and walk up to her and just put my arms around her and give her a big kiss, you know. She'd have to start all over again."

The siblings of the working-class runaways, unlike their brothers and sisters, tended to look more favorably upon their schools, seeing them as avenues to "the good life," to social mobility, and "success." Even those who were indifferent to classroom activities and to school generally were determined not to take unnec[illegible]y risks, get into trouble, and "mess up" their school records.

The middle-class runaways, by contrast, were far better behaved in school, although several did get into serious trouble for taking drugs or alcohol, or for stealing, and most came to the attention of school authorities for truancy. They tended to feel themselves at the mercy of their teachers, were humiliated when their teachers berated them publicly, and in general reacted to school failure with more anxiety.

In most of the middle-class families grades were a major source of conflict even when the child was not doing particularly badly by overall school standards. For example, a child with "only average" grades aroused alarm and disappointment in her intellectually ambitious mother who one day in desperation took the daughter to a psychologist to be tested. When she learned that the daughter had a very high IQ, the mother sent her away to school. But the child soon ran away, returned home, and began to do much worse. Although the middle-class siblings experienced similar pressures, they were able somehow to respond to them in more positive ways, or at least without such severe damage to themselves.

The anguish the middle-class runaways experienced in school was heightened by the success of their siblings, one of whom recalls how "odious comparisons were made between us": The runaway was the "awkward" and "stupid" one, the

sibling was the "bright" and "talented" one. The runaways, too, tended to measure themselves against their siblings and found themselves wanting.

Jobs and Work

For the young people who ran away from home, entry into the working world has also been difficult. Table 2 shows the current job status of 13 runaways and their siblings. Only six runaways are regularly employed today. The jobs held are Air Force sergeant, electrician (2), salesman, bartender, auto body repairman. The majority are unemployed or employed irregularly. Typically, their jobs--e.g., unskilled laborer, busboy, beekeeper, painter's helper--have not lasted more than a couple of months.

In contrast, all but one of the non-runaway siblings are now employed and have worked regularly. Ten of them have white collar jobs, e.g., business executive, social worker, psychiatric nurse, college teacher, computer programmer, editor, legal secretary, lawyer (in training), government worker. Moreover, those who do blue-collar work have more specialized, technically demanding jobs than the runaways, e.g., printer, elevator repairman, key-punch operator. And the siblings, with the exception of one chronically unemployed young man (the only high school dropout in the group), take their jobs seriously, regarding them as "careers."

The work histories of the runaways are radically different from those of their non-runaway siblings. Seven of the 13 runaways have not worked at all, or only sporadically at odd jobs. For two-thirds of the runaways, job changes have been associated with bad experiences in the work place; they have been fired for misconduct, poor

performance, trouble with co-workers or the boss, or they have quit out of frustration, disgust, or general discontent with their jobs.

The siblings' occupational trajectories, in contrast, tend to have more shape and continuity. These young people are more likely to have pursued a single line of work. They tend to be experienced and skilled, and they play decisive roles in the work place. Their job changes have typically been associated with promotions and advancement--that is, with upward occupational mobility.

The former runaways described their current (or latest) jobs as dull, repetitive, menial, and exhausting. They frequently complain that their jobs lack challenge and opportunity for personal expression and autonomy, and complain, too, about the lack of job security and union protection. Moreover, they do not see their jobs as offering career opportunities or chances for advancement. These attitudes are reflected in Table 2. Among the runaways, nine report feeling aversion for the work they do or have done in the past, whereas only one of the siblings (the same unemployed young man who dropped out of high school) expresses such feelings. Of the former runaways, only four report moderate satisfaction with their work. In contrast, eight of the siblings are highly satisfied with their work, and four moderately satisfied.

Income data for the runaways is especially difficult to present in an orderly form, primarily because of their irregular work histories and the questionable nature of some of their work activities. Five have no incomes to speak of and are supported either by their parents or by social agencies. Four of the former runaways report having jobs that pay $15,000 or more when they work, and several of the young men have supported themselves intermittently by engaging in criminal activities such as pushing drugs and committing robberies. With only one exception, all of the former runaways report that they are in debt.

Repeaters and Non-Repeaters

As might be expected in light of their special problems in high school, the repeaters have had far more difficulty than one-time runaways in making the transition to the working world. Indeed, most have made no such "transition." Only one of these young people has a regular job today. The others have very sketchy work histories and have been employed only briefly, if at all. It is the repeaters who feel the greatest dissatisfaction with whatever work they have done, have held the most menial jobs, have earned the least, and have most often been fired for misconduct or inadequacy on the job. More than the one-time runaways, they tend to depend on their families and on social service agencies for support and assistance.

Social Class

When we look at the ways in which the middle-class and working-class former runaways face the realities of life and work, the differences seem less pronounced than they were for school. The working-class young people seem to alternate between enjoyment of their freedom from the "rat race," and anger and frustration at being without jobs they need or saddled with jobs they dislike. When they do work, they are unhappy with the obligations, the routine, and the restrictions of the job; they complain about the indignities and humiliation of being a subordinate in the work place.

For the middle-class young people, problems in the work world seem to follow naturally from earlier problems in the family and in school. In general, these youth tend to feel a greater sense of failure, and their experiences on the job--or without jobs--appear to be more devastating than for their working-class counterparts. The middle-class young adults take no pleasure in their "freedom" from work and tend to regard themselves, as they did during their school years, as the black sheep of the family. They are at home neither with their middle-class families nor with working-class jobs or social settings.

While the middle-class youth tends to see himself as a failure, the working-class youth (if one takes what he says at face value) can compare himself with his parents and congratulate himself on his "freedom" and his "options" at least some of the time.

In general, the middle-class runaways have faced many of the same job problems and frustrations as their working-class counterparts. Like the others, for example, they too are unhappy about their lack of autonomy, about not being able to call their own shots. But the middle-class youth report feeling more anxious and depressed about their job situations. They doubt their talents and capabilities for anything better, and most of them feel themselves inferior and failures for not having gotten further along. Objectively, however, their actual work experiences have not been much different from those of their working-class counterparts.[4]

Family Relationships

Parents and Siblings

Previous studies have repeatedly pointed up an association between family disorganization and runaway behavior. In the present study, we also find early evidence of strained relations between the former runaway and their parents.

In childhood the most serious conflicts between parents and runaways centered around the child's performance in school. At some time, most of the runaways were denied privileges enjoyed by their more diligent and academically successful siblings, privileges that were contingent upon achieving a minimal level of performance (academic or behavior) in school. Unacceptable school behavior or grades sometimes meant that restrictions (and also additional household chores) were imposed for long periods of time.

Conflict also centered around household rules and regulations--a frequent problem for siblings as well. Most of the young people in the runaway group

thought their parents too strict and demanding, and believed they had heavier household burdens than their siblings, a claim that was not borne out consistently by either parents or siblings.

But the runaway's perceptions of injustice in their families are particularly significant for the parental rejection they reflect: As one young middle-class women complained, "I always felt I was getting the short end of the stick. It didn't matter what the issue was." It was less the perceptions of injustice, than their own assumptions that they indeed were less deserving which troubled the runaways the most. As one runaway said, "I was the mistake. You know the story of 'The Little Engine that Could'? Well, I was 'The Engine that Couldn't' in my family." Others characterized themselves as "the exception to the rule" and "the family freak," as outsiders who didn't belong and who couldn't measure up to the rest of the family.

All of the runaways in the study reported that at least one parent had hit or beaten them "more than a few times" before they ran away. The siblings, however, appear to have escaped violent punishments and severe reprimands: Only two report having been struck by a parent. Significantly, the parents of two runaway children were separately reprimanded by child welfare workers for being too harsh with the children. Both had made frequent use of physical punishment, one father using his belt (with buckle exposed) to beat his son, and the other "taking the stick to his (son's) backside to teach him a lesson." From the former runaways' perspectives, the picture that emerges is one of harsh, rejecting parents who exercised a degree of authority and control over their children beyond what the children considered justifiable or appropriate.

In the struggles between the runaways and their parents, the siblings were quietly supportive of one side or the other and even mediated between them on some occasions, but did not usually take an active part in the conflicts. Moreover, because siblings were more obedient and conforming to

household rules and regulations and to parental expectations, they were only occasional targets of parental wrath. As one sibling remarked: "I toed the line more than my sister. I did pretty much what I was told to do. But my sister was very willful."

According to parents, siblings were also more easy-going, even-tempered, and "reasonable" than the runaway children. In every case, the sibling was seen by parents as "easier to get along with"--often "from the time they were born." The runaway was difficult, fussy, volatile, and passionate, while the sibling was "born smiling, cheerful, and satisfied," as one mother put it. Over time the siblings tended to become skillful "psychologists." One sibling explains, "I knew when to keep my mouth shut. I could tell when my father was fuming--he got hard as steel--and I was careful to stay out of his way."

Current Relationships

The current living arrangements of the former runaways reflect the fact that most of them lack the economic means to control where and how they should live. Half of them do not live in separate residences but have remained in their parents' households, in institutions, or in makeshift (but not independent) households. Thus, they must rely on others, typically their families to provide them with both housing and transportation and other forms of support. Neither party seems to have much choice in the matter; necessity, not affection, has thrown the runaways back on their families, adding significantly to the already strained relations between them.

John is an example of a runaway who, now 23-years old, is again living at home. Just as in earlier years, there is a constant struggle between him and his mother about what is expected. His mother says, "John can't stand being told what to do, and especially he can't stand being told to do things around the house." ("I ain't no Suzie Homemaker.") On the other hand, she sees her

son's refusing to help in any way as treating her home as a rooming house: he eats, sleeps, watches television, uses the phone, and drops off his laundry there.

In many respects, the former runaways' relations with their parents are unchanged today from the way they were more than a decade ago. The intensity of earlier rancor has faded somewhat, but for the group as a whole, previous hostilities and bitterness are, if anything, more crystallized.

Repeaters and Non-Repeaters

Repeaters, even more than the one-time runaways, report that their parents were less affectionate and less considerate toward them than their siblings, and were more likely to report explicit rejection by their parents. "My father wanted to get rid of me and told me to get out of the house," said one young man after he had been picked up by County police for stealing. The parents also threatened putting their children out, turning them in to the police, or sending them to reform school. Six of the seven families of repeaters, in fact, formally appealed to public authorities or private agencies to deal with their children.

Parents of the repeaters describe themselves as deeply embittered about their children, some of whom are in jails, mental hospitals, rooming houses, and other temporary shelters, or the streets. For those living with parents, relations have long ago gone sour, even when the arrangement seems necessary and unavoidable, and when the parties involved have become accustomed to what for them is a way of life which they are powerless to change. Lacking jobs and incomes, they have sought refuge from reluctant parents who believed the arrangement was temporary and provisional. But the pressures have continued, and fortunes have not improved for the runaways. What was a short-term shelter has become a permanent residence.

Social Class

Family relationships affect the middle-class runaways differently from their lower-class peers. In contrast to the working class children, middle-class children were more likely to be pressured by parents who tended to impose their own standards onto their children and were openly disappointed and unwilling to settle for less. The result was high feelings of impotence, frustrations, and even despair.

Most parents of runaways still voice the hope that their children will "settle down," "straighten out," "get a job." But the middle-class parents, often in pained resignation have stopped talking about college and professions for the runaway child. Most of them say that they would eagerly settle for any kind of job for their children.

Spouses and Lovers

As might be expected, runaway youth also had problems in their sexual relationships. Some seem to have had no real emotional attachment with the opposite sex whatsoever; others have tried to form attachments and failed.

Of the 14 runaways, nine have tried marriage, but only four were married at the time of this study; four had divorced and another separated. Most of those who have tried marriage were the one-time runaways (seven); only two of the repeaters married and one of the two was divorced at the time of the interview. Five of the repeaters have remained single. For a few of these youth attachments have been transient. John has had attachments to a number of girls but they ended when they walked out on him. He blames them for breaking up the relationships, claiming they "don't have their act together." It is a theme repeated by many of the runaway boys--they describe their relationship in terms of being constantly "thrown off balance," and not knowing "where they stand."

Two additional prominent themes in the runaway group were dependency and repeating in marrige the vivid and open conflicts experienced with parents. Many of these young people returned home to parents after a fight with a lover or spouse, or being abandoned. Bruised and battered, they have come home again seeking refuge and comfort from the strains and despair of their lives--just as they earlier sought refuge and comfort from the crises in their homes by running away from them. There is deep irony and symmetry in these movements which take the children away from home in search of the same kinds of things that later bring them home again.

For those who have married, demands made by spouses seemed much like those they faced earlier in the family of origin: find a better job, make more money, "wear a suit and tie," do this, do that. To the runaway each new demand seemed to suggest some deficiency or inadequacy that had to be corrected, and revived old feelings that the runaway did not measure up.

Another recurring theme was that of exploitation. In their relations with members of the opposite sex, the runaways saw themselves as vulnerable and innocent victims in a confusing and dangerous world. The opposite sex is ever ready to take advantage of them, and they cannot protect themselves because they cannot catch on to what the rules of the game seem to be. They are used, trodden upon, and cheated. They are always shocked that such things could happen to them; they don't deserve it; people shouldn't act so badly.

Although the siblings have generally fared much better, in respect to marriage and love they were not very successful either. Three are divorced, although all three are not yet out of their twenties. Three others remain single. Nontheless, there are some differences: The siblings were more cautious than the runaways, and some describe themselves as "downright Victorian." When they undertook relationships, they began cautiously, and for the most part things progressed fairly smoothly. They were slower than the

runaways to begin sexual experimentation, and while their initial experiences were not always pleasant, some eventually found spouses or lovers with whom they could be intimate, comfortable, and relaxed.

Community Agency Contacts

In general, the runaways' experiences with community agencies seem to parallel their experiences in school, on the job, and in their families. Table 3 shows the legal and mental health problems experienced by the runaways and their siblings. By and large, runaways have been involved in more serious trouble than their non-runaway siblings. Only rarely did a sibling have a brush with the law, while 13 of the runaways have been arrested at some time, and nine have appeared in court to face formal charges. Charges have ranged in seriousness from "drunk and disorderly" to "burglary" and "assault and battery." Of the various charges, stealing appears to have been the most frequent. It is perhaps noteworthy that almost all of these young people had been caught stealing as children in their own homes, schools, or neighborhoods. In fact, stealing, by itself or in combination with other transgressions, resulted in four of the runaways being sent away on complaint of their parents to special schools or institutions. Clearly, however, these parental measures did not entirely curb their children's delinquent or criminal tendencies. On the contrary, their problems with the law have persisted into adolescence and early adulthood: six of the former runaways have been sentenced for criminal acts and have been subjected to some kind of penalty including probation, fines, or incarceration.

The siblings have been much more successful in staying clear of the law. Two have been arrested for minor offenses, but in each case, the charges were dropped. None have ever been subjected to court action or any disciplinary, rehabilitative, probationary, or other penal procedures. The two individuals

who were arrested (both from working-class families) were never in as serious trouble as their brothers, and they showed far more concern about the potentially damaging consequences. They spoke of what legal problems might do to their reputations, careers, and futures, and they saw to it that their record "stayed clean," hiring lawyers where necessary to "fix things up."

The situation is similar when we compare the mental health problems of the runaways with those of their siblings. While most of the runaways suffer from some kind of psychological symptoms or afflictions, and at some time have been formally referred for professional help, only one of their non-runaway siblings had such problems. Similarly, none of the siblings experienced drinking problems, while nine of the runaways experienced such problems. In addition, one of the runaways has been twice committed to a mental hospital and three others have been sent on court orders to institutions for emotionally disturbed youth.

Consistent with the findings presented in the previous sections on school and work, it is evident that these young people's social and emotional problems have been far more serious than those of their brothers and sisters. Furthermore, it is evident that the runaways' troubles continue into their present lives. The extensive contacts with agencies and professions--psychiatrists, schools for delinquents, counselors, private schools, halfway houses or jail--have neither reversed nor even noticeably ameliorated their problems.

Repeaters and Non-Repeaters

In Table 3 we see the same pattern reported earlier: Repeaters have been in more trouble and experienced more difficulties than those who ran away only once. However, the differences are more striking with respect to problems with the law than to mental health difficulties. All of the repeaters, but only two non-repeaters have had contact with the courts. A high proportion of both

groups report mental health problems, although these problems seem to have been more serious among the repeaters. Once again, it is the repeaters whose lives have been most difficult for themselves and others, and it is they who have suffered the most serious social, legal, and psychological consequences.

Social Class

As children, the working-class youngsters were more likely than middle-class youngsters to boast about their reputations as "toughs." Even today they betray a certain pride, or at least bravado, when they recount stories of their past to prove how "bad" they were, how they "tore up" the teachers and the school or went on a spree with the neighborhood gang.

The middle-class runaways also had their share of problems, but outside the family their activities largely went unnoticed. They were more likely to be described as "quiet," "isolated," or "loners" than trouble makers. Importantly, more of the middle-class than the working-class runaways were likely to suffer with drinking problems and/or psychological difficulties.

Among the siblings, class differences were less obvious. The working class siblings were more likely to get "little trouble" than the middle-class siblings (although not as serious trouble as their runaway brothers or sisters), but their attitude toward "trouble" was much like that of the middle-class siblings. They too, were fearful of what "trouble" could do to one's career, and one's future. When they did get into trouble, they made every effort to see that it did not get on their record, and as they grew up they seemed as successful as their middle-class peers in keeping out of trouble altogether.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was primarily intended as a feasibility study. Given the fact that we limited ourselves to those 14 of the 20 located families that remained in the area and were willing to participate in this follow-up, this present

study might better be understood as a series of 14 selected case studies rather than a study with a "sample size" of 14. Our "conclusions" then are not so much generalizations as hunches and speculation--drawn directly from 44 intensive interviews--about runaway outcomes and the processes associated with them.

Central to this study were the comparisons made between runaways and their siblings. In this way runaways could be compared with non-runaways while controlling some general family and background variables. Unlike their siblings, runaways--especially those that ran away more than once--had turbulent and painful relationships in childhood which intensified in adolescence and into adulthood. Today they continue to feel more pressured by their parents and discouraged by what they have become and how things have turned out. Lacking their siblings' confidence in managing their own lives, they continue to see themselves as victims of harsh, unresponsive parents and no longer talk about establishing themselves on an equal and independent footing with others in the adult world. In contrast with their siblings, they have limited skills, education and training. Their prospects do not look bright. As they probe the edges of the world of work, they appear to have few options and limited mobility.

One of the major findings of the original 1965 study was that the repeaters were likely to be seriously troubled youth, headed for more trouble, and in need of special attention from their families and agents of the community-at-large. In contrast, those who ran away only once appeared to be essentially indistinguishable from their non-runaway counterparts. For them, running away seemed to carry no special predictive or other significance.

The present follow-up offers strong suggestive confirmation of the original finding regarding repeaters. On every dimension in which the runaways differ from their non-runaway siblings, it is the repeaters who account overwhelmingly for these differences. Sadly for the repeaters, painful and often violent

confrontations with parents have had a paradoxical outcome: Those children who yearned most desperately for freedom and independence and ran away repeatedly from their families appear today to be the least free and the most dependent.

Less clear is the conclusion regarding the one-time runaways. In the present study, one-time runaways are clearly in a much lower-risk group than the repeaters, but it is by no means clear that running away only once is as benign and non-portentous as was suggested by the original study. The meaning and consequences of running away only once is an important issue that can and should be addressed by future research.

Another "finding" is that middle-class runaways seem to pay a higher price for running away than their working-class brothers and sisters. Other things being equal, middle-class runaways were more likely to experience deeper personal, emotional, and psychological problems and to make the least successful and least satisfying adjustment to adult life, whether this assessment be made from their own or others' perspectives.

One explanation that suggests itself is that middle-class children have further to fall in the social scale than their working-class counterparts and that, having fallen further, they experience greater assaults on their sense of self and self-worth. Another possible explanation is that by running away, the middle-class youth foregoes the college education and the family supports and contacts without which it is terribly difficult to sustain or achieve middle-class status. That is, since the middle-class family typically has more to offer its children (vis-a-vis occupational attainment) than the working-class family, the middle-class runaway is perhaps "giving up" more (instrumental) support than the working-class runaway, who can perhaps rely more easily on his own efforts to sustain himself in the same social class as his family.

And finally, quite apart from "falling" and consideration of status and self-image, the working-class youth may simply be a little better prepared than the middle-class youth to deal with the kind of challenges and threats that face those young people who try to make it on their own.

The point of this "finding" is not that middle-class runaways are more deserving of our attention than working-class runaways, but that social class makes a difference and that, political difficulties notwithstanding, interventions with runaways must take those differences into account.

In view of the different outcomes experienced by runaways of different social class, we were surprised to find such great differences between runaways and their non-runaway siblings--that is, when social class was, in effect, held constant. Indeed, the differences between children in the same families--their respective roles in the family and family dynamics, their self-images and self-confidence, their social skills, job competencies, and most important, their life-outcomes in early adulthood--were so pronounced as to convince even the skeptics among us that we cannot explain or understand running away in terms of social structure and social forces alone; one must also take personality and other psychological variables into account, and pay special attention to family dynamics and individual differences within a given family.

It is reasonably clear that most intervention efforts undertaken by social agencies--courts, detention centers, hospitals, and therapists--have failed most of the runaways in our selected sample. Whether or not the services generated by the Runaway Youth Act of 1974 will be more successful has yet to be determined. Our guess is that intervention needs to be started as early as possible--at the time of, say, the first runaway episode--in the hope of at least preventing repeated running away. While the prognosis for one-time runaways may not be especially grim, it is clear from this limited study that the repeaters are headed for serious trouble later in life.

NOTES

1. The original intention was to interview every third boy and every third girl. But home interviews offered too little privacy, and it was not always possible to arrange an interview at the Mental Health Study Center offices or other suitable site, such as a local church or fire station. In a few cases, either a parent or child refused the interview. When an interview with a returned or located runaway could not be conducted, the next available boy (girl) was selected. At the expiration of the period allowed for data collection, 96 intensive interviews had been conducted.

2. Prince George's County is one of the most transient areas in the United States. During the 12-year period, 1964-1976, it was among the fastest growing counties with over 800 new residents per week. Compared with the general County population, however, the families of runaway children seemed much more mobile. The original study found that 67% of the families with runaway children moved at least once during the previous five years, as compared with 50% of the general population of the County.

3. Psychological instruments were also administered, but are not included in this report.

4. An interesting difference, however, is the runaways' involvement in the Armed Forces. None of the working-class runaways enlisted in military service, but four of the middle-class runaways did so at their earliest opportunity. Two went into the Navy and two into the Air Force.

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TABLE 1

SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

GROUPS	LENGTH OF SCHOOLING			ACHIEVEMENT PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL*		BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS IN SCHOOL**	
	Dropped Out	Diploma Only	College	Achievement Problems	No Achievement Problems	Behavior Problems	No Behavior Problems
RUNAWAYS							
Repeaters	6	1	0	6	1	7	0
Non-Repeaters	2	5	0	2	5	3	4
Total	8	6	0	8	6	10	4
NON-RUNAWAY SIBLINGS	1	7	6	1	13	1	13

*Refers to grades of D or lower, reports of academic problems and retentions. (Based on self-reports checked against official school records.)

**Refers to written reports of misbehavior in class, suspensions, visits with principal or other school authorities.

TABLE 2

JOB PERFORMANCE*

GROUPS	CURRENT JOB STATUS		TYPE OF WORK AT LAST EMPLOYMENT		SELF REPORTED SATISFACTION WITH WORK**		
	Employed	Unemployed	Blue Collar	White Collar	Strongly Dislikes	Moderately Satisfied	Highly Satisfied
RUNAWAYS							
Repeaters	1	6	6	1	6	1	0
Non-repeaters	5	1	5	1	3	3	0
Total	6	7	11	2	9	4	0
NON-RUNAWAY SIBLINGS	12	1	3	10	1	4	8

*Excludes a housewife and her sibling.
**Includes reports of individuals who have worked at any time regardless of present employment status.

TABLE 3

COURT CONTACTS AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

GROUPS	COURT CONTACTS*		MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS**			
	No Court Contact	Court Contact	Drinking Problems	Psychological Symptoms	Involuntary Referrals	Voluntary (Self Referrals)
RUNAWAYS						
Repeaters	0	7	5	4	5	2
Non-Repeaters	5	2	4	4	3	0
Total	5	9	9	8	8	2
NON-RUNAWAY SIBLINGS	12	2	0	1	1	0

*Includes all charges, regardless of disposition.

**Source: Self-reports confirmed by sibling, parent, or both; or parent report confirmed by sibling or vice versa. Frequencies are not unduplicated.